

FINAL PROTEST FOR HIMSELF AND THE CLERGY OF NEW ENGLAND
AGAINST SLAVERY IN KANSAS AND NEBRASKA.

SPEECH

OF

HON. CHARLES SUMNER,

ON THE

NIGHT OF THE PASSAGE

OF

THE KANSAS AND NEBRASKA BILL.

IN SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES, MAY 25, 1854.

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SPEECH.

The Senate having under consideration the House Bill for the organization of the Territories of Kansas and Nebraska, and having voted down the Clayton amendment, and after the question had been put by the Chair, "Shall the Bill be engrossed and read a third time,"

Mr. SUMNER took the floor, and said:

Mr. President, it is now midnight. At this late hour of a session drawn out to unaccustomed length, I shall not fatigue the Senate by argument. There is a time for all things, and the time for this has passed. The determination of the majority is fixed; but it is not more fixed than mine. The bill which they sustain, I oppose. On a former occasion I met it by argument, which, though often attacked in debate, still stands unanswered and unanswerable. At present, I am admonished that I must be content with a few words of earnest protest against the consummation of a great wrong. Duty to myself, and also to the honored Commonwealth of which I find myself the sole representative in this immediate exigency, will not allow me to do less.

But I have a special duty, which I would not omit. I have on my desk remonstrances against the passage of this bill, some of which have been placed in my hands since the commencement of the debate to-day—and I desire that these voices, direct from the people, should be heard. With the permission of the Senate, I will offer them now.

The PRESIDING OFFICER, (Mr. STUART in the chair.) The remonstrances can be received by unanimous consent.

SEVERAL VOICES. Let them be received.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair hears no objection.

Mr. SUMNER. Taking advantage of this permission, I now present the remonstrance of a large number of citizens of New York against the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.

I also present the memorial of the religious Society of Friends, in Michigan, against the passage of the Nebraska bill, or any other bill annulling the Missouri compromise act of 1820.

I also present the remonstrance of the clergy and laity of the Baptist denomination in Michigan and Indiana, against the wrong and bad faith contemplated in the Nebraska bill. But this is not all.

I hold in my hand, and now present to the Senate, one hundred and twenty-five separate remonstrances, from clergymen of every Protestant denomination in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, constituting the six New England States. These remonstrances are identical in character with the larger one presented by my distinguished colleague, [Mr. EVERETT]—whose term of service here ends in a few days, by voluntary resignation, and who is now detained at home by illness—and were originally intended as a part of it, but did not arrive in season to be annexed to that interesting and weighty document. They are independent in form, though supplementary in their nature—helping to swell the protest of the pulpits of New England.

With pleasure and pride I now do this service, and, at this last stage, interpose the sanctity of the pulpits of New England to arrest this alarming outrage; believing that the remonstrants, from their eminent character and influence, as representatives of the intelligence and conscience of the country, are peculiarly entitled to be heard; and, further, believing that their remonstrances, while respectful in form, embody just conclusions, both of opinion and fact. Like them, sir, I do not hesitate to protest here against the bill yet pending before the Senate, as a great moral wrong; as a breach of public faith; as a measure full of danger to the peace and even existence of our Union. And, sir, believing in God as I profoundly do, I cannot doubt that the opening of an immense region to so great an enormity as Slavery is calculated to draw down upon our country His righteous judgments.

"In the name of Almighty God, and in his presence," these remonstrants protest against the Nebraska bill. In this solemn language, which has been strangely pronounced blasphemous on this floor, there is obviously no assumption of ecclesiastical power, as has been perversely charged, but simply a devout observance of the scriptural injunction: "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord." Let me add, also, that these remonstrants, in this very language, have followed the example of the Senate, which at our present session has ratified at least one important treaty, beginning with these precise words: "In the name of Almighty God." Surely, if the Senate may thus assume to speak, the clergy may do likewise, without imputation of blasphemy or any just criticism, at least in this body.

But I am unwilling, particularly at this time, to be betrayed into anything that shall seem like a defence of the clergy. They need no such thing at my hands. There are men in this Senate, justly eminent for eloquence, learning, and ability; but there is no man here competent, except in his own conceit, to sit in judgment on the clergy of New England. Honorable Senators, who have been so swift with criticism and sarcasm, might profit by their example. Perhaps the Senator from South Carolina, [Mr. BUTLER,] who is not insensible to scholarship, might learn from them something of its graces. Perhaps the Senator from Virginia, [Mr. MASON,] who finds no sanction under the Constitution for any remonstrance from

clergymen, might learn from them something of the privileges of an American citizen. And perhaps the Senator from Illinois, [Mr. DOUGLAS,] who precipitated this odious measure upon the country, might learn from them something of political wisdom. Sir, from the first settlement of these shores, from those early days of struggle and privation—through the trials of the Revolution—the clergy have been associated, not only with the piety and the learning, but with the liberties of the country. For a long time, New England was governed by their prayers more than by any acts of the Legislature; and at a later day, their voices aided even the Declaration of Independence. The clergy of our time may speak, then, not only from their own virtues, but from the echoes which yet live in the pulpits of their fathers.

For myself, I desire to thank them for their generous interposition. They have already done much good in moving the country. They will not be idle. In the days of the Revolution, John Adams, yearning for Independence, said: "Let the pulpits thunder against oppression!" And the pulpits thundered. The time has come for them to thunder again.

There are lessons taught by these remonstrances, which, at this moment, should not be unheeded. The Senator from Ohio, [Mr. WADE,] on the other side of the Chamber, has openly declared that the Northern Whigs can never again combine with their Southern brethren in support of Slavery. This is a good augury. The clergy of New England, some of whom, forgetful of the traditions of other days, once made their pulpits vocal for the Fugitive Slave Bill, now, by the voices of learned divines, eminent bishops, accomplished professors, and faithful pastors, uttered in solemn remonstrance, at last unite in putting a permanent brand upon this hateful institution. In consistency with this act, from this time forward, they can never more render it any support. Thank God for this! Here is a sign full of promise for Freedom.

These remonstrances have especial significance, when it is urged, as it has been often in this debate, that the proposition still pending proceeds from the North. Yes, sir, proceeds from the North; for that is its excuse and apology. The ostrich is said to hide its head in the sand, and then vainly imagine its coward body beyond the reach of its pursuers. In similar spirit, honorable Senators seem to shelter themselves behind certain Northern votes, and then vainly imagine that they are protected from the judgment of the country. The pulpits of New England, representing to an unprecedented extent the popular voice there, now proclaim that these six States protest, with all the fervor of religious conviction, against this measure. To this extent, at least, I confidently declare it does not come from the North.

From these expressions, and other tokens which daily greet us, it is evident that at last the religious sentiment of the country is touched, and, under this sentiment, I rejoice to believe that the whole North will be quickened with the true life of Freedom. Sir Philip Sidney, speaking to Queen Elizabeth of the spirit which

animated every man, woman, and child, in the Netherlands, against the Spanish power, exclaimed, "It is the spirit of the Lord, and is irresistible." A kindred spirit now animates the free States against the Slave Power, breathing everywhere its precious inspiration; and forbidding repose under the attempted usurpation. I repeat, it is the spirit of the Lord, and is irresistible. The threat of disunion, too often sounded in our ears, will be disregarded by an aroused and indignant people. Ah, sir, Senators vainly expect peace. Not in this way can peace come. In passing this bill, as is now threatened, you scatter from this dark midnight hour, no seeds of harmony and good will, but broadcast through the land, dragon's teeth, which haply may not, as in ancient fable, spring up in direful crops of armed men, but yet, I am assured, sir, will they fructify in civil strife and feud.

From the depths of my soul, as a loyal citizen and as a Senator, I plead, remonstrate, protest, against the passage of this bill. I struggle against it as against death; but, as in death itself corruption puts on incorruption, and this mortal body puts on immortality, so from the sting of this hour I find assurances of that triumph by which Freedom will be restored to her immortal birthright in the Republic.

Sir, the bill, which you are now about to pass, is at once the worst and the best bill on which Congress ever acted. Yes, sir, worst and best at the same time.

It is the worst bill, inasmuch as it is a present victory of Slavery. In a Christian land, and in an age of civilization, a time-honored statute of Freedom is struck down, opening the way to all the countless woes and wrongs of human bondage. Among the crimes of history, another is about to be recorded, which no tears can blot out, and which, in better days, will be read with universal shame. Do not start. The Tea Tax and Stamp Act, which aroused the patriot rage of our fathers, were virtues by the side of your transgression; nor would it be easy to imagine, at this day, any measure which more openly and perversely defied every sentiment of justice, humanity, and Christianity. Am I not right, then, in calling it the worst bill on which Congress ever acted?

But there is another side to which I gladly turn. Sir, it is the best bill on which Congress ever acted; for it prepares the way for that "All hail hereafter," when Slavery must disappear. It annuls all past compromises with Slavery, and makes all future compromises impossible. Thus it puts Freedom and Slavery face to face, and bids them grapple. Who can doubt the result? It opens wide the door of the Future, when, at last, there will really be a North, and the Slave Power will be broken; when this wretched Despotism will cease to dominate over our Government, no longer impressing itself upon every thing at home and abroad; when the National Government shall be divorced in every way from Slavery, and, according to the true intention of our fathers, Freedom shall be established by Congress everywhere, at least beyond the local limits of the States.

Slavery will then be driven from its usurped foothold here in the District of Columbia, in the National Territories, and elsewhere beneath the national flag; the Fugitive Slave Bill, as vile as it is unconstitutional, will become a dead letter; and the domestic slave trade, so far as it can be reached, but especially on the high seas, will be blasted by Congressional prohibition. Everywhere within the sphere of Congress, the great *Northern Hammer* will descend to smite the wrong; and the irresistible cry will break forth, "No more slave States!"

Thus, sir, now standing at the very grave of Freedom in Kansas and Nebraska, I lift myself to the vision of that happy resurrection, by which Freedom will be secured hereafter, not only in these Territories, but everywhere under the National Government. More clearly than ever before, I now see "the beginning of the end" of Slavery. Proudly I discern the flag of my country, as it ripples in every breeze, at last become in reality, as in name, the Flag of Freedom—undoubted, pure, and irresistible. Am I not right, then, in calling this bill the best on which Congress ever acted?

Sorrowfully I bend before the wrong you are about to enact. Joyfully I welcome all the promises of the future.

Mr. MASON. I understand that the petitions which the Senator [Mr. SUMNER] who has just taken his seat offers, were to be admitted as they were offered by the unanimous consent of the Senate. Two of them, when offered, were sent to the President's table. The last he has reserved, and made the vehicle for communicating the sentiments of the pulpits of New England to the Senate, on the subject of this bill. I object to its reception, and I object to it, because I understand that Senator to say that it is *verbatim* the petition that was presented by his honorable colleague who is not now with us, in which the clergy presented themselves in this Senate and to the country, as a third estate, speaking not as American citizens, but as clergymen, and in that character only. I object to its reception. I object to it, that I may not in any manner minister to the unchristian purposes of the clergy of New England, as the Senator has just announced them. I object to it, that I may be in no manner responsible for the prostitution of their office, (once called holy and sacred, with them no longer so,) in the face of the Senate and of the American people. I object to it, that the clergymen of my own honored State, and of the South, may, as holding a common office in the ministry of the gospel, be in no manner confounded with or contaminated by these clergymen of New England, if the Senator represents them correctly.

'Sir, if the Senator has represented these clergymen correctly, I rejoice that there is to be a separation between the church North and the church South; for, I say, if these men dare to lay aside the character of American citizens, and come here profaning their office, profaning the name of the Almighty, for the purpose of political alliances, they are unworthy of their associates in the church.

Sir, it is the first time in the history of this country that a church of any denomination has asserted a right to be heard, as a church, upon the floors of legislation; and if the Senator represents that body correctly, they have profaned their office, and I predict now a total separation between the church North and the church South, if I understand the sentiments of the church South. The church there, I know, is yet pure in its great and holy mission. When its ministers address themselves from the pulpit, they are heard with respect, under the sanctity of their office. You find none of them coming here to the doors of legislation to mingle in political strife. They truly hold themselves "unspotted from the world."

If the Senator who has just taken his seat has correctly expounded the clergymen of New England, I object to that petition. If he has correctly stated that it is *verbatim* copied from the petition presented by his colleague, I say it is a prostitution of their office to the embrace of political party; and the Senate shall not, by my assent, be made the medium of so unholy an alliance. I do not mean to go further into this debate; but I object to the reception of the petition.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The petitions cannot be received without unanimous consent.

Mr. SUMNER. It may be, at this moment, within the competency of the honorable Senator from Virginia to object to the reception of these remonstrances; but I am satisfied that, at another time, his calmer judgment will not approve this course, much less the ground on which now, as well as on a former occasion, he has undertaken to impeach the right of clergymen to appear, by petition or remonstrance, at the bar of Congress. Sir, in refusing to receive these remonstrances, or in neglecting them in any way, on reasons assigned in this Chamber, you treat them with an indignity which becomes more marked, because it is the constant habit of the Senate to welcome remonstrances from members of the Society of Friends, in their religious character, and from all other persons, by any designation which they may adopt. Booksellers remonstrate against the international copyright treaty; last makers against a proposed change in the patent laws; and only lately the tobaccoists have remonstrated against certain regulations touching tobacco; and all these remonstrances have been received with respect, and referred to appropriate committees in the Senate. But the clergy of New England, when protesting against a measure which they believe, with singular unanimity, full of peril and shame to our country, are told to stay at home. Almost the jeer has gone forth, "Go up, thou bald head!" If not well, it is at least natural, that the act you are about to commit should be attended by this congenial outrage.